

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSK #0267/01 0731349
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 141349Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3974
INFO RUEHVL/AMEMBASSY VILNIUS 3601
RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 3255
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KIEV 3198
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3381
RUEHRA/AMEMBASSY RIGA 1609
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 0950
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS MINSK 000267

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: Minsk Election Weekly XII (March 6-March 10)

Ref: Minsk 192

11. This is the twelfth in a weekly series of election-oriented reports, providing brief items of interest related to the March 19, 2006 presidential elections.

Repression and Harassment

12. Milinkevich Activists Sentenced to Jail

On March 9, a Moskovsky District Judge in Minsk sentenced Belarusian Popular Front leader Vintsuk Vyachorka, Pyotr Baberako, Vladimir Gridin, Aleksei Makovich, Aleksandr Pavlovsky, and Pyotr Tolar to 15 days in jail and a Partizansky District Judge sentenced Dmitry Kudryavtsev, Artyom Litvinko, Sergei Lyantsevich, and Aleksandr Zelko to 15 days in jail for organizing and participating in two unsanctioned "rallies" on March 8. The rallies were open-air meetings between Milinkevich and voters outside of the Berestye movie theater and the Minsk Tractor Works' House of Culture after both venues denied the candidate space to hold his meetings. The 15-day sentences will prevent the activists from participating in the presidential election. [Note: See septel for a detailed review of the many forms of repression against the Milinkevich team.]

13. Lebedko Fined For Meeting with Voters

On March 7, a Mogilev judge fined United Civic Party leader Anatoly Lebedko BYR 1.55 million [USD 720] for organizing an unsanctioned rally and resisting police officers. Lebedko on March 7 traveled to Mogilev to meet with voters at Kuleshov Mogilev State University, but at the last minute city authorities denied permission for the meeting at the university. Nonetheless, Lebedko met with several hundred voters outside of the university for an hour. Afterwards, police officers insisted that Lebedko come with them, but after refusing, the police forcibly detained Lebedko and brought him to court where he was fined. A judge later sentenced head of Milinkevich's Mogilev campaign office Vladimir Shantsev to 15 days in connection with the same meeting.

14. 28,000 Milinkevich Leaflets Seized in Gomel

On March 6, Gomel police seized 28,000 leaflets from a Milinkevich activist transporting them from Minsk to Gomel. Police stopped the car under the suspicion that it had been stolen. After the activist produced the proper paperwork for the vehicle, police seized the materials and filed charges

against the activist, because statement in the leaflets, claiming Milinkevich would be the future president, was allegedly "offensive."

15. Milinkevich Activist Fined for Distributing Leaflets

On March 6, a Rogachev judge fined electioneer Vladimir Khodasevich USD 145 for distributing leaflets in support of Milinkevich in a place not specifically designated for election campaigning. Police arrested Khodasevich on February 26 for handing out fliers and copies of the independent daily "Narodnaya Volya."

Observers

16. Only Invited Observers Have Right to Observe

On March 9, the MFA announced that only observers invited by the GOB and granted the appropriate accreditation have the right to observe Belarus' elections. MFA spokesman Andrei Popov claimed that neighboring countries intend to send uninvited representatives not to monitor, but to provoke conflict situations and destabilize the situation. Popov said his allegations were confirmed by European Parliament member Bogdan Klich's plans to send an ad hoc delegation to Belarus without applying for an invitation.

17. CIS: Belarus Election Process Compliant With Law

On March 9, the CIS observation mission to Belarus reported that Belarus' ongoing presidential race was in compliance with the Electoral Code. According to the CIS mission, presidential candidates are granted venues to meet with voters in all cities and districts and candidates are given equal opportunities to advertise in the press, on television and radio. The CIS statement contained no comment on Kozulin's March 2 beating or attacks on journalists. On March 3, a top-level CIS observer remarked that the GOB should not have edited Kozulin's TV appearance and denounced police attacks on reporters.

The Central Election Committee

18. Fair Share in State Press to All

On March 6, the CEC ruled that the Ministry of Defense newspaper "Vo Slavu Rodiny" must be willing to publish the election programs of all candidates after it published Lukashenko's election manifesto. "Vo Slavu Rodiny" was not one of the seven papers assigned by the CEC to print the election platforms. CEC Secretary Nikolai Lozovik stated, "If the management of the publication decided to publish the program of one candidate, it should expect other candidates to apply for this." Milinkevich's campaign team already submitted its platform to the paper for publication.

19. No Limitations on Printed Advertisement Distribution

On March 7, CEC President Lidya Yermoshina confirmed that election activists are free to distribute printed advertisements in any location. This clarification was issued after supporters of Milinkevich were repeatedly fined for handing out literature in areas allegedly not sanctioned for political advertising.

110. CEC Has Grounds To Disqualify Kozulin

CEC Head Yermoshina on March 9 announced that the CEC had "formal" grounds to disqualify Kozulin as a candidate after being charged with hooliganism for trying to force his way into the National Press Center on February 17 and his March 2 beating. However, Yermoshina claimed the CEC would not remove Kozulin from the race, as he collected 150,000 signatures and his removal could cause a public backlash

¶11. More People Eligible to Vote

The CEC reported on March 9 that 7,020,000 Belarusians (roughly 70 percent of the population) are eligible to vote in the presidential elections. The number of registered voters increased by 34,000 since the 2004 Parliamentary elections.

----- The Candidates -----

¶12. Milinkevich Forced to Hold Two Rallies Outdoors in Minsk

On March 8, 1,000 voters attended a meeting with Milinkevich outside the Berestye movie theater after the theater's administration canceled its agreement at the last minute to host a children's party, forcing Milinkevich to hold the meeting outside. A similar occurrence happened later that day when Milinkevich tried to enter the Minsk Tractor Works' Cultural Palace for another previously scheduled rally, but Palace authorities cancelled the arrangement, citing ongoing repairs. Riot police tried to disperse the crowd of 200 people who stood outside the Palace by warning that the meeting was unsanctioned. Milinkevich had no sound equipment for the event after police stopped the vehicle transporting his loudspeakers. Ten Milinkevich supporters were arrested and sentenced to 15 days in jail, including Vyachorka.

¶13. Kozulin Suggests He and Milinkevich Withdraw

Kozulin and Milinkevich met on March 9 to discuss their possible withdrawals from the presidential race in protest of the GOB's violations of the electoral law. Kozulin also suggested the two candidates seek a postponement of the election until July 16 and urged Milinkevich to consider which candidate was best fit to compete with Lukashenko. Kozulin offered to work with Milinkevich to adopt a declaration on common actions. According to Kozulin, two candidates working together can better inform the population, prevent falsifications, and monitor the vote. Milinkevich has not publicly reacted to the proposals.

¶14. Kozulin Asks Supreme Court to Remove Lukashenko from Ballot

Kozulin's campaign manager Mycheslav Grib on March 9 appealed to the Supreme Court to remove Lukashenko from the ballot for not suspending his work during the presidential elections as stipulated in the Electoral Code. According to Grib, the CEC responded to his first appeal that Lukashenko was not required to go on leave as the code exemption applies to an incumbent running for any term. The Electoral Code does not mention protocol for a two-term incumbent running for a third term.

----- Quote of the Week -----

¶15. On March 9, CEC Head Lidiya Yermoshina responded to Milinkevich's March 8 request that all presidential candidates, including President Lukashenko, should undergo a psychiatric examination:

"[The request] is political and Mr. Milinkevich can independently undergo a mental health evaluation if he wants to."

KROL